

**Rep. Hankins**



**Rep. Delvin**

## 8th District

# The 1998 Agenda

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Winter 1998

Dear Friends,

As we begin the 1998 legislative session, we intend to build on a solid record of service to 8th District residents over the past three years. This year is a short session — only 60 days — but several major issues demand our attention. They include transportation, an \$861 million budget surplus, tougher penalties for drunken driving, and continued efforts to improve literacy and academic performance in our schools.

This newsletter briefly outlines our approach to these major issues, and provides additional information regarding policies and programs important to citizens throughout the Tri-Cities area. Please take a moment to glance at this information, and share your comments questions and concerns with us by phone, letter or e-mail. Remember, we represent you, and it's our job to listen. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

*Shirley Hankins*  
Shirley Hankins

*J. Delvin*  
Jerome Delvin

## **Join us for town hall meetings in the 8th District**

**Saturday, Feb. 21**

10 a.m. — noon  
Richland City Hall  
Council Chambers  
505 Swift Blvd.  
Richland

2 p.m. — 4 p.m.  
Kennewick City Hall  
Council Chambers  
210 W. 6th Ave.  
Kennewick

## Transportation — stretching the dollars we have

The people of Washington want a different approach to funding transportation projects. We have seen the same result in polls and surveys across the state.

The public's position is understandable. People see that the state has a \$19 billion budget. They believe we should be able to find money for road projects from existing sources. Furthermore, when the state has a budget surplus of almost \$1 billion, it doesn't seem right that citizens should be asked to pay higher fees.

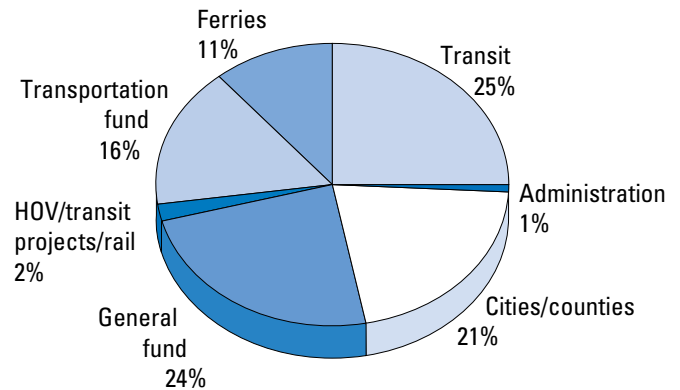
As a result, it is highly likely that we will find additional funding for transportation projects this session without raising fees. At this early stage, it is impossible to say which plan will be approved, but the final decision is likely to include a combination of some or all of the following elements:

- Shifting additional revenue from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) to transportation improvements;
- Offering sales tax credits on transportation projects;
- Applying a portion of the budget surplus to transportation projects;
- Developing new cost-efficient construction procedures; and

- Pursuing savings suggested by results of a Department of Transportation audit to be completed early this year.

### MVET Distributions

Total 1997-99: \$1.59 billion



This year, you can expect a reduction in license tab fees — known as the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) — and a shift of MVET revenues from the general fund to transportation. Currently, about 24 percent of MVET revenue — more than \$300 million — goes to the state general fund, where it is used for purposes unrelated to transportation.

## DUI penalties

We cannot repair the tragedies caused by habitual drunken drivers, but we can do more to prevent them from getting behind the wheel of a car. I expect to see several proposals this year that would expand the penalties for DUI offenses. Here are some of the ideas the Legislature will discuss:

- Require certain people convicted of drunk driving to operate only vehicles equipped with ignition interlock devices
- Authorize impoundment and forfeiture of vehicles operated by individuals with a suspended or revoked driver's license
- Authorize impoundment of vehicles whenever a driver violates DUI laws
- Increase fines and jail times nearly threefold for people convicted of DUI, and add extra penalties for repeat offenders
- Require a motorist's driver's license to be administratively suspended for 90 days without exception for a first DUI conviction

## Fiscal restraint

You can expect us to hold the line on state spending this year. Our budget is about \$150 million below the Initiative 601 spending limit, and we want to keep it that way. Since Republicans took control of the House of Representatives in 1995, we have seen a sharp decrease in spending growth, along with an upturn in the state economy.

These twin trends have led to one of the largest budget surpluses in recent memory: \$861 million. Many people wonder what the state will do with this "extra" money. Of course, there are those who can find any number of creative ways to spend it all. However, the general consensus is that we will set aside a large portion of the surplus — more than \$500 million — for a "rainy day," meaning an economic downturn. As explained earlier, some of the remaining money may be used for transportation improvements.

## Survey results

Last fall, Rep. Hankins mailed a survey to 8th District citizens. We'd like to share the results of that survey with you now.

**Distribution:** Registered voters, 8th District  
(approximately 25,000)

**Returns:** Approximately 1,000 (4 percent)

### Question 1:

Should we pursue a different route for Burlington Northern Santa Fe's rail lines through the Pasco/Kennewick area?

Yes — 210  
No — 657  
No response — 83

### Question 2:

Should telecommunications providers pay for access to public rights-of-way?

Yes — 761  
No — 148  
No response — 41

### Analysis:

This question was prompted by a bill I sponsored last session, which I plan to reintroduce this year. Without delving into the thorny details of telecommunications deregulation, I'll put it this way: Our roads, highways and rights-of-way are bought and paid for by our citizens. I think anyone who wants access to those rights-of-way, be it a citizen or a utility company, should provide fair compensation. Apparently, 8th District residents agree.

### Question 3:

Should all Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) funds go to the transportation budget permanently?

Yes — 486  
No — 432  
No response — 32

### Analysis:

The lack of a clear-cut answer to this question reflects the dilemma faced by the Legislature as we begin the 1998 session. Generally speaking, everyone agrees that we must find more funding for transportation projects. Redirecting MVET money is one possible solution, but the budgeting stipulations of Initiative 601 make it tricky. We'll hear more about this in the coming weeks, I'm sure.

### Question 4:

Should all state lottery revenues support school construction programs?

Yes — 697  
No — 253  
No response — 0

### Analysis:

This question stems from a bill I sponsored that would dedicate lottery revenues to a permanent school construction account. Such an interest-bearing account would allow the state to fully fund school construction. The response suggests that citizens favor this approach.

Let me add an additional point or two on this topic. Some people think lottery revenues are directly tied to education, which is not true. Currently, lottery revenues go into the general fund, which pays for many services as well as education.

Another common misconception is that the lottery generates enough revenue to pay for education. Unfortunately, it's not even close. In the 1996-97 biennium, the lottery is expected to generate about \$220 million. At the same time, our education budget for 1996-97 is \$8.9 billion.

### Question 5:

Should we limit the number of bills legislators may file?

Yes — 790  
No — 61  
No response — 99

I sponsored a bill in 1996 that would limit the number of bills legislators can introduce during a session. Some states have similar rules, including Colorado, Indiana and Michigan. In Washington, there is no limit. A legislator can introduce any number of bills. I think a limit might force us to use our time more efficiently, and I will reintroduce the legislation in 1998.

I want to thank the citizens who took the time to answer this survey, and encourage residents to respond to similar questionnaires in the future. We can never have too much public participation in government.

## Education

When children can't read, they can't learn. That's why our priority in education continues to be improving the literacy of our K-12 students and encouraging parental involvement. Recent test scores among fourth-grade students show that less than half of them met the standards of reading ability for their age.

In the Legislature, we have been making reading education a top priority for the past several years. Key legislative leaders have been making a real crusade out of correcting the problems in the way reading is now taught, and bringing effective, research-based techniques back into each and every classroom.

### A record to remember

We don't pass bills and forget about them. Results count, and after we set policy, we make sure it translates to results. Part of our job this year is to implement the major policy reforms we passed in 1997. We have a strong record to build on for 1998. Here's what we'll be monitoring this year:

### SPOTLIGHT ON NEW POLICY

#### What to watch

- **Juvenile justice reform**

- Tougher sentencing standards
- Sentencing alternatives, including boot camps
- Mandatory parental involvement in juvenile court cases
- Juvenile justice grants for local communities

- **Welfare reform**

- Time limits on benefits (five years over one's lifetime)
- Requirements to work, search for work or perform community service
- Child-care assistance for working parents
- Job training
- Teen parents must live at home and progress toward a diploma or GED to receive benefits


- **Budget**

- Holding the line on spending
- Protecting I-601 limits

- **Property taxes**

- Temporary 4.7 percent cut in state rate becomes permanent in 1998 (Referendum 47)
- Local governments must vote publicly before raising property taxes above inflation rate

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